

Message Text

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S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 ATHENS 7460

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, GR

SUBJECT: GREEK POLITICAL LEADERSHIP: AVEROFF

REF: ATHENS 6922 AND 6867

1. THIS MESSAGE, THE LAST OF THREE ON GREEK POLITICAL LEADERS, DISCUSSES DEFENSE MINISTER AVEROFF. THE PREVIOUS TWO MESSAGES IN THE SERIES (REFTELS) TREATED PRIME MINISTER CARAMANLIS AND FOREIGN MINISTER MAVROS.

2. EVANGHELOS AVEROFF-TOSSITSAS, THE 64 YEAR YOLD DEFENSE MINISTER IN THE COALITION GOVERNMENT OF CONSTANTINE CARAMANLIS, IS ALMOST AS WELL KNOWN OUTSIDE OF GREECE AS HE IS AT HOME. FOR OVER SEVEN YEARS HE WAS GREECE'S FOREIGN MINISTER IN THE GOVERNMENTS FORMED BY CARAMANLIS BETWEEN 1956 AND 1963. DURING THAT PERIOD HE WAS PROMINENTLY ASSOCIATED WITH CARAMANLIS IN MOST OF THE IMPORTANT INITIATIVES WHICH SHAPED GREEK FOREIGN POLICY AFTER THE GREEK CIVIL WAR AND ARE NOW BEING REAPPRAISED IN THE

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LIGHT OF THE CYPRUS CRISIS OF JULY, 1974: THE NEGOTIATION OF THE

LONDON-ZURICH ACCORDS IN 1960 WHICH CREATED AN INDEPENDENT CYPRUS AND TACITLY ABANDONED THE POPULAR GOAL OF UNION WITH CYPRUS; THE RAPPROCHEMENT BETWEEN GREECE AND TURKEY WHICH OCCURRED AFTER 1960; AND THE ASSOCIATION OF GREECE WITH THE COMMON MARKET WHICH BEGAN IN 1962. WHILE GREECE'S INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE UNITED STATES DATES FROM 1947 AND GREECE JOINED NATO IN 1952, BEFORE AVEROFF BECAME FOREIGN MINISTER, HE HAS BEEN A CONSISTENT ADVOCATE OF CLOSE GREEK-AMERICAN FRIENDSHIP AND OF GREEK MEMBERSHIP IN NATO AS MEANS TO COUNTER THE PRESSURES OF SLAV COMMUNISM ON GREECE'S NORTHERN BORDERS.

3. AVEROFF'S EMINENCE IN GREEK FOREIGN POLICY, AND HIS CORDIAL RELATIONS WITH AMERICAN AND WESTERN EUROPEAN LEADERS STRETCHING BACK OVER TWENTY YEARS, HAVE ADMIRABLY SERVED THE INTERESTS OF GREECE BUT TO SOME EXTENT HAVE DISSERVED HIS OWN POLITICAL AMBITIONS. WHEREAS MOST LATTERDAY GREEK POLITICIANS ASPIRE TO BE TAKEN AS SERIOUSLY ABROAD AS THEY ARE AT HOME, AVEROFF HAS THE OPPOSITE PROBLEM. UNLIKE AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN, WHOM THE FRENCH DISAPPROVED AS A POTENTIAL AMBASSADOR IN PARIS BECAUSE, ALTHOUGH A FINE FELLOW, "CE N'EST POURTANT PAS UN ARTICLE D'EXPORTATION," AVEROFF OFTEN SEEMS TO BE REGARDED BY GREEKS AS EXCLUSIVELY AN EXPORT COMMODITY. HE IS FREQUENTLY PRAISED FOR HIS ABILITY TO INFLUENCE FOREIGNERS, BUT RARELY FOR HIS ABILITY TO INFLUENCE GREEKS. AS A RESULT, DESPITE HIS EVIDENT TECHNICAL QUALIFICATIONS AND THE RESPECT HE ENJOYS ABROAD, AVEROFF HAS NEVER BEEN A SERIOUS CONTENDER FOR THE PREMIERSHIP AND THE TALENT FOR WELL-POLISHED DIPLOMATIC CONFIDENCES AND SUAVE OBJECTIVITY THAT ENDEARS HIM TO FOREIGN STATESMEN TENDS TO ESTRANGE HIS FELLOW COUNTRYMEN. A REPUTATION FOR OBJECTIVITY CAN BE A CRIPPLING HANDICAP IN GREEK POLITICS SINCE IT CUTS ACROSS THE GRAIN OF A SYSTEM BASED ON PERSONALITIES, INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP LOYALTIES AND OTHER FORMS OF SUBJECTIVE REALITY.

4. AVEROFF HAS ANOTHER DISADVANTAGE IN GREEK POLITICAL TERMS. HE IS A BRIDGE-BUILDER IN A COUNTRY OF SELF-PERPETUATING POLITICAL ENCLAVES. (IT IS APPROPRIATE THAT THE ONLY WELL-KNOWN BRIDGE IN GREECE, THE GORGOPOTAMOS VIADUCT, BECAME SO NOT WHEN IT WAS BUILT BUT WHEN IT WAS BLOWN UP IN WORLD WAR II BY GREEK RESISTANCE FORCES.) BRIDGE-BUILDING, LIKE OBJECTIVITY, IS ONE OF THOSE NOMINAL VIRTUES WHICH IS SO EXCEPTIONAL IN GREEK POLITICS THAT IT

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INSPIRES MORE DISTRUST THAN ADMIRATION. AVEROFF'S APTITUDE FOR IT ADDS TO HIS REPUTATION FOR FOREIGNNESS. IT IS NOT UNUSUAL TO HEAR GREEKS EXPLAIN THAT AVEROFF ACTS THE WAY HE DOES BECAUSE HE IS "ITALIAN," "ROMANIAN," "ALBANIAN" OR EVEN "RUSSIAN" (IN THE PRE-REVOLUTIONARY SENSE).

5. IN FACT HE IS NONE OF THESE THINGS, OR RATHER, LIKE MOST MODERN GREEKS, HE IS A LITTLE OF ALL OF THEM. THE AVEROFF FAMILY

COMES FROM THESSALY AND ITS CONSIDERABLE WEALTH DERIVES FROM
TIMBER AND TEXTILES. IT IS A FAMILY WITH A LONG RECORD OF
PUBLIC BENEFACTION. THE BATTLESHIP "AVEROFF" WHICH SAW SERVICE IN
THE BALKAN WARS AND IN WORLD WAR I WAS DONATED TO THE ELLENIC
NAVY BY A DISTANT RELATIVE, GEORGE AVEROFF, WHO ALSO BUILD A JAIL
IN ATHENS THAT BEARS IS NAME AND RECON-
STRUCTED THE OLYMPIC

STADIUM. THE ORIGINAL FAMILY NAME SEEMS TO
HAVE BEEN APOSTOLOLAKOS.

"AVEROFF" WAS ADOPTED BY AN ANCESTOR WHO EMIGRATED TO IMPERIAL
RUSSIA. "TOSSITSAS" WAS ADDED BY THE PRESENT DEFENSE MINISTER
TO PERPETUATE THE NAME OF YET ANOTHER WEALTHY RELATIVE AND
PHILANTHROPIST, BARON MICHAEL TOSSITSAS, WHO DIED CHILDLESS AND
LEFT A LARGE INHERITANCE TO EVANGHELOS AVEROFF ON THIS CONDITION.

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6. THE AVEROFFS WERE A LIBERAL VENEZELIST FAMILY AND, AFTER
STUDYING POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC SCIENCE AT LAUSANNE, EVANGHELOS
AVEROFF ENTERED POLITICS AS A LIBERAL IN 1946 AND SERVED AS
MINISTER OF SUPPLY AND OF NUATIONAL ECONOMY IN POST-WAR

GOVERNMENTS OF THE POLITICAL CENTER. IN 1956 HE LEFT THE LIBERALS AND BECAME MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE IN THE SECOND CARAMANLIS GOVERNMENT, MOVING TO FOREIGN AFFAIRS IN MAY OF 1956. HIS INTERNATIONAL REPUTATION GREW RAPIDLY AFTER THAT TIME.

7. IT HAS BEEN JUSTLY EARNED. AVEROFF IS A SERIOUS AND HARD-WORKING MAN WITH A WELL-CONSIDERED VIEW OF WORLD POWER RELATIONSHIPS AND THE RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES THEY CREATE FOR GREEK FOREIGN POLICY. HE IS A REALIST AND A CONSERVATIVE WHOSE DIPLOMATIC STYLE COMBINES SHREWDNESS, AFFABILITY AND OLD-SCHOOL-TIEISM IN ABOUT EQUAL PROPORTIONS. THE SIGHT OF AVEROFF MOVING WITH IMMACULATE CONFIDENCE THROUGH A DIPLOMATIC RECEPTION, CONVERSING COMFORTABLY IN FRENCH, ENGLISH OR ITALIAN, EVOKES MEMORIES OF AN ERA OF SALON DIPLOMACY THAT HAD CEASED TO EXIST BEFORE HE WAS BORN. THE LATE GREAT POLITICAL CANTOONIST OF
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VIMA, DIMITRIADES, ALWAYS USED TO DEPICT AVEROFF IN SPATS AND A CUTAWAY AND THE INCLINATION OF MANY GREEKS STILL TO SEE HIM THAT WAY IS ANOTHER EASON FOR THEIR TENDENCY TO UNDERESTIMATE HIS INTELLECTUAL ABILITY AND THE VALUE OF HIS SERVICES TO GREECE.

8. IN MANY RESPECTS AVEROFF'S HAS BEEN A UNIQUE CONTRIBUTION BECAUSE, MORE EFFECTIVELY THAN MOST GREEK POLITICAL LEADERS SINCE WORLD WAR II, HE HAS BEEN ABLE TO DEROMANTICIZE GREEK GOREIGN POLICY AND INTERPRET GREEK INTERESTS IN TERMS COMPREHENSIBLE TO FOREIGN ALLIES WHO HAVE LEARNED TO TREAT WITH RESERVE THE LARGER CLAIMS OF HELLENISM.

9. THE LANDSCAPE OF GREEK FOREIGN POLICY IS PEOPLED BY THE GODS, NYMPHS AND SATYRS THAT FIGURE SO PROMINENTLY IN GREEK MYTHOLOGY. THE COMPARISON DOES NOT END THERE. THE MODERN GREEK VIEW OF THE EXTERNAL WORLD, LIKE THE ANCIENT GREEK VIEW OF THE UNIVERSE, IS ETHNOCENTRIC AND SUBJECTIVE AND PRODUCES A THEORY OF FOREIGN POLICY THAT SEEMS OBSESSED WITH FORCES BEYOND THE CONTROL OF GREECE. THE MYTH EMBODIES THE REALITY. NO STATE WITH A POPULATION OF 9 MILLION, A GROSS NATIONAL PRODUCT OF \$14.2 BILLION AND SOME 8,500 MILES OF COASTLINE TO DEFEND HAS MANY CHOICES TO MAKE IN ITS FOREIGN POLICY. MODERN GREECE, WHICH IS TO SAY GREECE FOR THE PAST 150 YEARS, HAS HAD ONLY TWO: WHETHER TO ALLY ITSELF WITH THE DOMINANT POWER ON THE BALKAN PENINSULA OR THE DOMINANT POWER IN THE MEDITERRANEAN. THE CONSISTENCY WITH WHICH GREECE HAS CHOSEN THE LATTER COURSE IS ONLY EQUALLED BY THE INCONSISTENCY OF GREEK POLITICANS IN EXPLAINING WHY THEY DO SO.

10. THE RESULT IS A SURFACE TURBULENCE IN GREEK FOREIGN POLICY THAT CONCEALS THE DEEPER AND MORE POWERFUL CONFLUENT CURRENTS THAT FLOW BENEATH IT AND HAS GIVEN GREECE A LARGELY UNDESERVED REPUTATION AMONG ITS ALLIES FOR "UNPREDICTABILITY." WHETHER AS FOREIGN MINISTER OR SIMPLY AS A WELL-CONNECTED PRIVATE

CITIZEN AVEROFF HAS WORKED WITH ENERGY AND SKILL TO REVEAL TO NON-GREEKS THE UNDERLYING REALITIES OF GREEK FOREIGN POLICY. THIS IS A NOTABLE SERVICE TO A COUNTRY WHICH IS OFTEN AND JUSTIFIABLY CRITICIZED FOR MAKING THE WORST OF A GOOD CASE.

11. DURING THE PERIOD OF MILITARY GOVERNMENT AVEROFF SHOWED HIS VALUE IN ANOTHER WAY. HE WAS A CONSISTENT, IF LOW-KEYED OPPONENT OF THE JUNTA (TYPICALLY HE WAS TRYING TO BUILD BRIDGES BEHIND

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THE SCENES) AND HIS REASONED CRITICISMS OF THE GENERALS AND THE COLONELS RECEIVED GREATER AND MORE RESPECTFUL ATTENTION ABROAD THAN THE SHRILLER DENUNCIATIONS OF OTHER ALIENATED POLITICAL LEADERS. WHEN AVEROFF WAS ARRESTED IN 1967 THE REGIME WAS EXPOSED TO A STORM OF PROTEST FROM FOREIGN FRIENDS OF AVEROFF IN THE UNITED STATES AND EUROPE. HE WAS SENTENCED TO FOUR YEARS IN PRISON BUT PARDONED AND RELEASED AFTER A WEEK. FOLLOWING THE ABORTIVE NAVAL MUNITY OF MAY, 1973, HE WAS AGAIN ARRESTED AND THIS TIME HELD FOR ALMOST TWO MONTHS IN PRISON. ONCE MORE THE REGIME WAS SHARPLY ATTACKED ABROAD AND MUCH OF THE CRITICISM CAME FROM THOSE WHOM THE JUNTA HAD LOOKED TO FOR SUPPORT OR AT LEAST BENIGN NEUTRALITY. BY THEIR TREATMENT OF AVEROFF THE MILITARY RULERS OF GREECE DEMONSTRATED HOW COMPLETELY THEY HAD SEPARATED THEMSELVES FROM EVEN THE MOST MODERATE CURRENTS OF GREEK POLITICAL THOUGHT.

12. AVEROFF'S RECOND DURING THE PAST SEVEN YEARS DOES NOT, HOWEVER, SEEM TO HAVE ALTERED GREEK ESTIMATES OF HIS LEADERSHIP POTENTIAL. WHEN CARAMANLIS RETURNED TO ATHENS HE APPARENTLY TRIED UNSUCCESSFULLY TO PERSUADE AVEROFF TO ACCEPT THE FOREIGN AFFAIRS PORTFOLIO. WHEN HE THEN INSTALLED AVEROFF IN DEFENSE IT WAS PROBABLY MORE TO REASSURE THE GREEK MILITARY THAT THERE WOULD BE NO REPRISALS AGAINST THEM THAN TO PROVIDE THEM WITH STRONG, DISCIPLINARY LEADERSHIP. AVEROFF WAS ONCE AGAIN BUILDING A BRIDGE, THIS TIME BETWEEN CARAMANLIS AND THE SOLDIERS. AS DEFENSE MINISTER HE HAS DONE HIS USUAL CONSCIENTIOUS AND INTELLIGENT JOB. AWARE THAT HIS REPUTATION FOR FLEXIBILITY IS A POLITICAL LIABILITY HE HAS TRIED, NOT VERY CONVINCINGLY, TO PROJECT AN IMAGE OF STERN AUTHORITY. UNTIL RECENTLY HE WAS IN THE HABIT OF DISPLAYING A PISTOL TO STARTLED VISITORS AND SAYING THAT IF ANY OFFICERS UNDER HIS COMMAND CHALLENGED CIVILIAN RULE HE WOULD NOT HESITATE TO USE IT. AS LONG AS THE COMMANDING FIGURE OF CARAMANLIS STANDS BEHIND HIM THE CONTINGENCY SEEMS UNLIKELY TO ARISE.

13. AFTER THE ELECTIONS CARAMANLIS MAY TURN TO AVEROFF AGAIN AS HIS LEADING CANDIDATE FOR MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS. AVEROFF IS ALREADY SAYING THAT HE WILL NOT ACCEPT. "I BURIED ENOSIS IN 1960," HE STATES. "THE NEXT SETTLEMENT WILL BE WORSE FOR GREECE AND SOMEONE ELSE WILL HAVE TO MAKE IT." BUT THE QUESTION IS

WHETHER ANYONE ELSE HAS ENOUGH SKILL AND EXPERIENCE TO PREVENT

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THE NEXT CYPRUS SETTLEMENT FROM BEING WORSE THAN IT HAS TO BE
FROM GREECE'S STANDPOINT. LOOKING AT THE COMPLEXITIES OF THE
CYPRUS PROBLEM TODAY, AND THE WEAKNESS OF THE GREEK POSITION,
THE CONCLUSION IS INESCAPABLE THAT IT WILL TAKE ALL OF
AVEROFF'S DIPLOMATIC ABILITY TO OBTAIN A SATISFACTORY
COMPROMISE AND ALL OF CARAMANLIS' POLITICAL AUTHORITY TO
PERSUADE GREEK PUBLIC OPINION TO ACCEPT IT.
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